

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

This Amendment is in response to the Final Office Action dated June 11, 2008.

Claims 1 and 8 are pending in the present application. Claims 1 and 8 have been rejected. Claim 1 has been amended to further define the scope and novelty of the present invention, and to correct typographical and grammatical errors, in view of the Examiner's comments, in order to place the claims in condition for allowance. Support for the amendments to claim 1 is found on page 7, lines 4-9, of the specification. Applicants respectfully submit that no new matter has been presented. Claims 1 and 8 remain pending. For the reasons set forth more fully below, Applicants respectfully submit that the claims as presented are allowable. Consequently, reconsideration, allowance, and passage to issue are respectfully requested.

In the event, however, that the Examiner is not persuaded by Applicants' amendments and arguments, Applicants respectfully request that the Examiner enter the amendments and arguments to clarify issues upon appeal.

Rejections Under 35 U.S.C. §103

Examiner Stated:

Claims 1 and 8 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over Lee et al., (6,837,428) in view of Nichtberger et al., (4,882,675) in further view of Schulze, JR. et al., (2002/0055875) in further view of Jovicic et al., (U.S. Patent No. 5,855,007)...

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Response to Arguments

On page 12 of the Applicant's Remarks dated March 21, 2008, Applicant states "Lee nor Jovicic teach or suggest receiving a coupon, where the coupon is a paper coupon that is fed into a coupon reader of the at least one self checkout stations."

Examiner respectfully disagrees since Lee discloses a paper coupon in Figure 7. Further, receiving a coupon from a customer, wherein the coupon is a paper coupon that is fed into a coupon reader of the at least one self checkout stations (Fig. 7; column 7, line 12-20).

Applicant further argues that neither Lee nor Jovicic teach or suggest the coupon pools “wherein one coupon pool is a global pool having coupons stored in the global pool are accessible by all customers, wherein the other coupon pool is a personal pool that is associated with the customer such that coupons stored in the personal pool are accessible only by the customer.”

Examiner agrees that Lee does not explicitly disclose global and personal pools to store invalid coupons.

However, Jovicic teaches a system for storing the coupon in a global and personal pool at the server, wherein the global pool is accessible by all customers (column 6, lines 4-41).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to add Jovicic’s server with coupons that is accessible to all customers to Lee and Nichtberger’s sharing of coupons among customers. One would be motivated to do this in order to provide a longer life to coupons among consumer groups where coupons may be shared or transferred among users.

Applicant further argues that neither Lee nor Jovicic teach or suggest collecting tracking information related to the coupon.

Examiner agrees that Lee does not explicitly disclose tracking information related to the coupon.

However, Jovicic teaches receiving the tracking information in the file by an item manufacturer (column 2, line 21-38);

accessing the global pool at the server by the item manufacturer (column 6, lines 34-41);

selecting at least one coupon in the global pool (column 7, lines 46-52); and analyzing the tracking information for the selected coupon (column 6, lines 39-58).

Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to add Jovicic’s analysis of the coupon tracking information to Lee and Nichtberger’s sharing of coupons among customers. One would be motivated to do this in order to provide a longer life to coupons among customer groups where the coupons may be shared or transferred among users.

Applicants respectfully traverse the Examiner’s rejections. The present invention provides a method for processing coupons by a self checkout system, where the self checkout system comprises at least one self checkout station coupled to a server. In accordance with the present invention, the method includes receiving a coupon from a customer, where the coupon is a paper coupon that is fed into a coupon reader of the at least one self checkout stations; attempting to validate the coupon against at least one item scanned by the customer after the couple reader receives the coupon from the customer; allowing the customer to choose whether to store the unvalidated coupon, and if the customer chooses to store the unvalidated coupon, converting the paper coupon into an electronic coupon. The method also includes collecting tracking information related

to the coupon and storing the tracking information in a file at the server; transmitting the electronic coupon from the one self checkout station to the server; destroying the paper coupon after the paper coupon has been converted into an electronic coupon. The method also includes storing the electronic coupon into one of two coupon pools at the server if the coupon fails to validate against the at least one item, where one coupon pool is a global pool having coupons stored in the global pool which are accessible by all customers, where the other coupon pool is a personal pool that is associated with the customer such that coupons stored in the personal pool are accessible only by the customer, where the tracking information comprises the coupon pool in which the coupon is stored, where the stored electronic coupon can be utilized at a subsequent sales transaction, where the global pool allows the second customer to search the global pool for a coupon that validates against an item scanned by the second customer during the subsequent sales transaction, where the global pool allows a second customer in the subsequent sales transaction to utilize the coupon, where a value of the coupon is deducted from a price of the item if the coupon and the item are validated, and where the personal pool allows the customer to access the global pool, select at least one coupon in the global pool, and transfer the selected coupon to a personal account at the server. The method also includes allowing the customer to search one or more of the global pool and the personal pool for coupons that can be applied to any scanned items by the customer. Lee in view of Nichtberger, in further view of Schulze, in further view of Jovicic, in further view of Mastrianni, in further view of Goodwin does not teach or suggest these features, as discussed below.

Lee discloses a self-checkout apparatus. A self-checkout system includes a first conveyor having a security tunnel which measures a characteristic of a product placed on the conveyor. A code identifying the product is first input into the system through UPC scanning or other input means, and then placed on the conveyor. When the characteristic of the product is measured (e.g., weight, height, width, length), it is compared to corresponding information within the system. If the data matches or is within a predetermined tolerance, the product is transported down the conveyor to a second conveyor, which further transports the product to a bagging area. When the customer is finished scanning products, an input device allows the customer to select self-payment through either cash, credit, debit, or other means (e.g., debt, store credit and the like). Other features include automatic security tag deactivation and coupon redemption. (Abstract.)

Nichtberger discloses a paperless system for distributing, redeeming and clearing merchandise coupons. Cents-off merchandise coupons are distributed and redeemed immediately and electronically. An electronic display of coupons valid for use in a particular store is presented to customers in that store. When a customer makes a selection of coupons from the display, the selection is recorded. The customer is subsequently identified at a store checkout station as the one who made the selection. In a preferred embodiment, the identification is made by scanning a special card adapted for use with the system. The items purchased in the store by the customer are recorded, and any matches between the coupons selected and the items purchased are determined electronically. The customer is immediately credited in accordance with the terms of the matched coupons. Redeemed coupons are periodically cleared electronically. (Abstract.)

Schulze discloses a coupon redemption system. This system for processing coupons includes a coupon scanner for reading information from a coupon and a host processor for using the information to determine whether the coupon is valid. The coupon scanner includes a coupon modification unit for use in modifying valid coupons so that the coupons are no longer redeemable. The coupon scanner also includes a coupon sorter for sorting valid coupons between the coupon modification unit and an audit lock box unit that stores unmodified valid coupons for eventual audit. The system further includes a rejected coupon lock box unit for temporarily storing selected coupons that were rejected by the coupon scanner but which were still redeemed by store personnel. The stored rejected coupons are later analyzed by a third party service provider to determine if they were validly redeemed by the store. (Abstract.)

Jovicic discloses an electronic coupon communication system for generating and redeeming unique product discount coupons over public computer networks such as the Internet. The system comprises a first Internet node, an Internet coupon server and an Internet coupon notification center. The Internet coupon server generates a unique Internet coupon using a coupon generation process. The Internet coupon server accepts an on-line selection of one of the available unique Internet coupons from a user of the Internet node and transmits the coupon back to the user's printing device or e-mail storage. It then records the transaction in its coupon database and notifies the transaction to the Internet Coupon Notification Center. The Internet Coupon Notification Center subsequently records the transaction. Furthermore, a coupon redemption center can electronically verify coupon validity and record coupon redemption by communicating with the Internet Coupon Notification Center. (Abstract.)

Lee fails to teach or suggest “attempting to validate the coupon against at least one item scanned by the customer after the couple reader receives the coupon from the customer,” as recited in amended independent claim 1. The Examiner referred to Figure 11 and column 7, lines 52-62, of Lee as teaching the attempting step. However, column 7, lines 12-19, of Lee does not state that a coupon reader receives the coupon. Instead, Lee teaches that “coupons may be scanned using the UPC scanner.” This teaches away from a coupon reader receiving the coupon as in the present invention. Furthermore, Lee teaches in column 7, lines 12-19, that the system “gives instructions to the customer to deposit the coupon in the coupon collection box.” Nowhere does Lee teach that the coupon collection box performs any validation function. Column 7, lines 21-27, suggests that the coupon collection box merely collects coupons. Lee describes a sensor, but the sensor is merely for “detecting when a coupon has been inserted.” Furthermore, Figure 11 of Lee teaches that a coupon is scanned and identified with an item or transaction before the system (coupon collection box) collects the coupon. This is opposite from the present invention where the system (coupon reader) attempts to validate the coupon after the coupon reader receives the coupon. As such, Lee further teaches away from the present invention. Column 7, lines 52-62, of Lee merely describes the scanning process and does not contemplate a validation attempt after a coupon reader receives a coupon, as in the present invention.

A secondary reference stands or falls with the primary reference. Because Lee fails to teach or suggest “attempting to validate the coupon against at least one item scanned by the customer after the couple reader receives the coupon from the customer,” a combination of Lee, Nichtberger, Schulze, and Jovicic also fails to teach or suggest the

claimed invention. Accordingly, claim 1 is allowable over Lee in view of Nichtberger, in further view of Schulze, in further view of Jovicic for at least this reason.

Applicants agree with the Examiner that Lee fails to teach or suggest a choice that a customer makes with an unvalidated coupon. The Examiner has relied on Schultze to cure this defect of Lee, referring to paragraph 8 of Schultze as teaching a coupon lock box. However, Lee specifically teaches that “the transaction will not continue until the coupon is deposited in the coupon collection box” (column 7, lines 18-20). This clearly teaches away from “allowing the customer to choose whether to store the unvalidated coupon, as in the present invention.” Therefore, Lee cannot be combined with another reference to negate this teaching.

Furthermore, Applicants respectfully submit that Schultze also fails to teach or suggest, “allowing the customer to choose whether to store the unvalidated coupon,” as recited in amended independent claim 1. Even if Schultze were to be combined with Lee, paragraph 8 of Schultze merely states that if a coupon is invalid, the checkout clerk is given an opportunity to override the equipment by entering the coupon information into the system by other means. The coupon is placed in a rejection coupon lock box and periodically retrieved for validation to see if the store can be reimbursed for a redemption. This section strongly suggests that the store clerk handles the invalid coupon when entering the coupon information into the system and then stores the unvalidated coupon in the rejected coupon lock box. After all, it is the store clerk who would be motivated to store the coupon for later redemption. Nowhere does this section of Schultze mention or suggest that the customer is given a choice of whether to store the unvalidated coupon, as in the present invention.

Therefore, claim 1 is allowable over Lee in view of Nichtberger, in further view of Schulze, in further view of Jovicic for at least this reason.

Applicants agree with the Examiner that Lee does not disclose the coupon pools, “wherein one coupon pool is a global pool having coupons stored in the global pool which are accessible by all customers, wherein the other coupon pool is a personal pool that is associated with the customer such that coupons stored in the personal pool are accessible only by the customer,” as recited in amended claim 1. The Examiner has relied on Jovicic to cure this defect of Lee, referring generally to column 6, lines 4-41, of Jovicic as disclosing this feature. However, this section of Jovicic merely mentions that an “Internet Coupon Server can maintain current information on electronic coupons 300 available to consumers,” and that providers of coupons can “make their electronic coupons available to consumers over the Internet Coupon Server” (column 6, lines 40-48). While the Internet Coupon Server of Jovicic may provide coupons to consumers generally, nothing in Jovicic teaches or suggests a coupon pool that is a “personal pool that is associated with the customer such that coupons stored in the personal pool are accessible only by the customer,” as in the present invention.

Therefore, Lee in view of Nichtberger, in further view of Schulze, in further view of Jovicic does not teach or suggest the combination of steps as recited in amended independent claim 1, and this claim is thus allowable over the cited references.

Dependent claim 8

Dependent claim 8 depends from amended independent claim 1. Accordingly, the above-articulated arguments related to amended independent claim 1 apply with equal

force to claim 8, which is thus allowable over the cited reference for at least the same reasons as claim 1. Dependent claim 8 is also allowable based upon the added limitations that distinguish it over the cited art.

Applicants agree with the Examiner that Lee and Jovicic in combination do not disclose a manufacturer modifying a coupon's price and expiration date based on analysis. The Examiner has relied on Mastrianni as disclosing these features, referring to paragraph 45 of Mastrianni.

Mastrianni discloses a coupon exchange network and service bureau. The invention provides methods, apparatus and systems for a coupon service facilitated by a coupon service bureau that manages the easy creation and exchange of targeted coupons created by users and other coupon associates. Moreover, immediate coupon information may be provided at the store using coupon devices that notify users about product information and the best discounts that are available at the current store or further advantages available at other stores. (Abstract.)

However, Applicants respectfully submit that Mastrianni also fails to teach or suggest "modifying the selected coupon by modifying a price of the item based on the analysis and by modifying an expiration date of the selected coupon," as recited in dependent claim 8. Paragraph 45 of Mastrianni mentions an expiration date merely as a modifying criteria (paragraph 45, lines 14-16). However, nowhere does Mastrianni teach or suggest modifying a coupon's expiration date. Instead, Mastrianni teaches "modifications including: deleting the targeted coupon, graphically modifying the targeted coupon, changing the targeted coupon value, and moving the targeted coupon from one location to another" (paragraph 45, lines 27-32). This teaches away from

modifying a selected coupon “by modifying an expiration date of the selected coupon,” as in the present invention.

Therefore, Lee in view of Nichtberger, in further view of Schulze, in further view of Jovicic, in further view of Mastrianni, in further view of Goodwin does not teach or suggest the combination of steps as recited in amended independent claim 8, and this claim is thus allowable over the cited references.

CONCLUSION

Applicants’ attorney believes this application is in condition for allowance. Should any unresolved issues remain, Examiner is invited to call Applicants’ attorney at the telephone number indicated below.

Respectfully submitted,

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/Joseph A. Sawyer, Jr./
Joseph A. Sawyer, Jr.
Reg. No. 30,801

Customer Number 47052
(650) 493-4540
(650) 493-4549